In the kitchen the woman who carries her clothes in a shopping cart stirs soup, a rich mahogany broth. It boils in the iron cauldron.
I have given her this job which she loves for the way it lifts her into a person.

The people are gathering in the dining room—straying in one by one out of the cold square, dumping their frayed coats on a long table.
The other tables are set; the soup is ready.

But before we can serve, the Director begins a speech about value and popularity.
He stands on a loft above us where he cannot see the people sitting expectantly at the long tables.

There has been a vote to decide who among us is the most popular; gold stars have been awarded.
He is announcing stars, and he does this very slowly, beginning with one star and working up to ten. The soup is getting cold. The people are getting hungrier and hungrier. He doesn't see their hunger. Not the time, or the cold, or my voice in his ear—can stop him.

Finally it is too late, and the cold useless soup is removed and the people, whose needs were so great, file out, hunger filling their stomachs.

The Director, who sees none of this, goes on with his endless words, while the cook—who has become nothing again—and the staff-people—who are again reminded
they are not worth anything—
gather in the kitchen
and fight like birds at a feeder
over the leftover loaves.